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One Hundred Seventh Congress

Congress of the United States

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November 29, 2001

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The Honorable David M. Walker
Comptroller General
General Accounting Office
41 G Street, N.W. Room 7000
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Walker:

Much of the popular press overseas, often including the government-owned media, daily depict the United States as a force for evil, accusing this country of an endless number of malevolent plots against the world. This image of the United States is more than a mere irritation. It has a direct and negative impact on American interests, not only by undermining our foreign policy goals but also by endangering the safety of Americans at home and abroad. It is difficult to understand how it is that the country that invented Hollywood and Madison Avenue should have such trouble promoting a positive image of itself and its policies overseas. Clearly, this problem has not emerged suddenly but has been building for decades. The question facing us is what can we do to correct the situation.

The United States has a range of programs that constitute our public diplomacy efforts, including public affairs officers stationed at U.S. embassies overseas who work with host country media outlets, academic and professional exchanges with 140 countries, and radio services broadcasting to people around the world in their languages. While these and other efforts have been galvanized by the terrorist attacks of September 11 to help fight the international war on terrorism, it would appear that the problem is too great and too entrenched to be solved by current efforts alone.

Given the importance of this issue, we request that the General Accounting Office perform a comprehensive review of our public diplomacy efforts. We are asking the General Accounting Office to examine the effectiveness of our programs in promoting a positive image of the United States and its foreign policy and to examine what additional measures may be needed to enhance them overseas. Specifically, we ask that you address the following questions:

- What is the full range of U.S. public diplomacy programs and activities currently available to the United States through the Department of State and other agencies? What resources are devoted to these efforts and how are resource allocation decisions made? How effective are efforts within and between agencies to coordinate these separate public diplomacy efforts?
- What impact has the merger of the U.S. Information Agency with the State Department had on the mission and resources dedicated to public diplomacy and the conduct of public affairs? What initiatives are planned or underway that would make the current programs more effective? In the current staffing and organization of our embassies and consulates and other offices overseas, do the requisite expertise and resources exist to carry out an effective and sustained public diplomacy program in the host countries' print and electronic media? What additional resources, if any, might be needed to accomplish this task?
- How has the effectiveness of international broadcasting been measured in the past and what, if any, new methods are planned? What methodologies are currently employed in identifying target groups and conducting audience surveys? How is the information thus generated incorporated into planning and programming?
- What new approaches, including technical innovations, should be considered for more effective message delivery? How effectively are television, AM and FM radio, the Internet, and other electronic media currently being utilized? What are the plans to more effectively utilize these media? What are the barriers to achieving greater access to the populations in other countries, including access to private and government-owned print and electronic media?
- How do the obstacles, opportunities, and available resources of U.S. public diplomacy efforts differ from region to region, especially by major ethnic groups? Does the Muslim world present special difficulties regarding the delivery, reach, and effectiveness of U.S. public diplomacy efforts? Are there successful programs administered by other countries or private sector organizations that can serve as a model for U.S. public diplomacy efforts in these areas?
- Is there a sufficient number of foreign language specialists available to the broadcast services and the public affairs offices in embassies worldwide to adequately support our public diplomacy efforts? Is there sufficient interagency cooperation in the training and sharing of language specialists?
- What opportunities and methods exist to improve U.S. public diplomacy efforts in countries ruled by regimes hostile to the United States and its policies?
- Are there useful lessons to be learned from the private sector, especially those experienced in operating in other countries and cultures, regarding reaching target audiences and developing program content for those audiences? How can the private sector be better utilized in the development of more effective programming, as measured by enhanced appeal to target audiences and persuasiveness of message? To what extent is contracting selected functions of

our public diplomacy efforts to the private sector in the United States and other countries necessary or advisable in order to ensure the development and delivery of more effective programming?

We recognize that this is a broad request with many potential issues meriting detailed analysis. Nevertheless, the Committee would appreciate a preliminary report on U.S. programs and activities and the resources devoted to U.S. public diplomacy efforts by the spring of 2002. The more complete ~~assessment of the effectiveness and reach of U.S. public diplomacy and broadcasting efforts, and~~ options for improving both, can be completed at a later date. Please contact Doug Seay of the Committee staff on (202) 225-5043, if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

HENRY J. HYDE
Chairman

TOM LANTOS
Ranking Democratic Member